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ABSTRACT

A system of classification for tellings and retellings by Panama's Kuna Indians reveals the dimensions of their structure and function, textually, contextually, strategically, and ethnographically. Kuna verbal life can be characterized in terms of three distinct ritual-ceremonial traditions marked by three distinct languages, settings, sets of official actors, and speech events and two basic patterns in the organization and performance of discourse. A constant interaction of poetry and discourse is also characteristic of Kuna verbal life. The typology deals with the intersection and interplay of saying or reporting, and retelling or reformulating. Five types of telling-retelling are distinguished as: (1) a telling followed immediately and sequentially by a retelling; (2) a telling followed by a retelling to a different audience in a different setting; (3) telling of the same content in one way for one purpose in one context and in a different way for another purpose in another context; (4) a range of contexts for performance of magical texts; and (5) performance of the same narrative content as the central verbal event of two separate and discrete ritual-ceremonial traditions, by different performers, in different linguistic varieties, in different contexts. Attention to these different telling-retelling relationships allows for focus on interplay of allusive and non-allusive language, rhetorical strategies, verbal expression of new information, and the Kuna theory and practice of magic and narration. (Author/MSE)

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TELLINGS, RETELLINGS, AND TELLINGS WITHIN TELLINGS: THE STRUCTURING AND ORGANIZATION OF NARRATIVE IN KUNA INDIAN DISCOURSE

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TELLINGS, RETELLINGS, AND TELLINGS WITHIN TELLINGS: THE STRUCTURING AND ORGANIZATION OF NARRATIVE IN KUNA INDIAN DISCOURSE*

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores one salient aspect of the structure and organization of the discourse of the Kuna Indians of Panama -- multiple tellings and retellings of the same referential and narrative content. It is intended as an exercise in the ethnographic analysis of discourse. It focuses on a set of processes in the creation of meaning in the language and speech of a particular nonliterate society. The expressive processes are studied as rooted in social and cultural context. Their structure is shown to be tightly integrated with their functions and strategic uses.

The Kuna Indians are a society of more than 25,000 agriculturalists, most of whom inhabit a string of islands along the northeast coast of Panama known as San Blas. The Kuna have a rich and elaborate system of language and speech, which can be viewed in relation to Kuna politics, religion, curing, magic, and puberty practices, but which can also be studied in and for itself, in terms of textual, discourse, and literary properties.[1] I begin with a brief overview of Kuna verbal life, in order to provide background which is necessary for my discussion here.

Kuna verbal life can be characterized in a number of ways. One striking and central way is in terms of three distinct ritual-ceremonial traditions which are marked by three distinct languages, settings, sets of official actors, and speech events. The three are:

1. The gathering house tradition in which saklas (chiefs) and other political leaders address their villages in chants and speeches.

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2. The curing-magical tradition in which specialists address many different kinds of spirits.

3. The puberty rites tradition in which a specialist addresses a single spirit, that of a long flute.[2]

Associated with the three ritual-ceremonial verbal traditions are two general, basic patterns in the organization and performance of discourse, each of which is widespread in the world:

1. A fixed or relatively fixed text which must be memorized in line by line fashion, which is the pattern found in curing, magical, and puberty rites discourse, that is, human to spirit communication.

2. A flexible 'text' or discourse, in which a general idea, theme, or set of metaphors is adapted to fit a particular situation, which is the pattern characteristic of gathering house discourse, that is, human to human communication.

Although the Kuna consider both curing-magical and puberty rites texts to be fixed and although both are memorized line by line from the mouth of a teacher-specialist, there are interesting differences between them. One, which is of particular relevance here, is that in curing-magical texts, slight variations of an essentially non-referential nature are tolerated, involving very superficial aspects of the phonology and morphology of noun and verb suffixation. Puberty rites texts by contrast are even more fixed. Not the slightest variation in phonology or morphology is tolerated.[3] Puberty rites texts then, and not curing-magical texts, can be compared to the fixed 'compulsive word,' characteristic of Navajo 'ways' which are used in Navajo curing rituals.[4] It is also interesting that both the fixed puberty texts and the relatively fixed curing and magical texts on the one hand and gathering house discourse on the other make use of formulaic expressions similar to those which have been described as the distinguishing feature of the Slavic guslar, the 'singer of tales.'[5] The Slavic formulaic expressions enable the guslar to compose his tale anew in each performance. Kuna formulaic expressions contribute to the performance of a fixed, memorized text in certain genres and ways of speaking and to the flexibility and individual creativity of other genres and ways of speaking.

The fixed/flexible distinction, which I have used in order to establish

a typology of Kuna genres and ways of speaking, is best conceived of as a continuum, rather than an absolute dichotomy. It is clearly not particular to the Kuna, but is rather a universal dimension which has relevance in all societies. Where societies can be expected to differ is in the way in which this continuum groups and characterizes various speech events and genres of speaking within them.[6] It is clearly not the case, in spite of the very interesting arguments to the contrary of Albert Lord and Jack Goody, that there is no pure memorization of fixed texts in nonliterate, oral societies.[7] The Navajo 'ways' and the Kuna puberty texts demonstrate the contrary. Nor is memorization the rule in the literature of preliterate societies, as an earlier generation of scholars believed. Both the Slavic 'singer of tales' and the Kuna gathering house chanters and speakers attest to this. Rather the oral discourse of nonliterate societies provides a rich diversity of possibilities with regard to the relative fixity or felxibility of speech, as well as with regard to other dimensions.

Kuna verbal life can also be characterized in terms of a constant interaction of poetry and rhetoric. This interaction is manifested in the form of a set of processes and patterns, one of which, retellings, multiple tellings, and tellings within tellings, is the focus of this paper. Others, which have distributions which go beyond the Kuna, are:

1. The poetic and rhetorical use of grammatical and semantic parallelism, figurative and symbolic language, formulaic expressions and topoi, and narrative, all of which have world-wide distributions, but which have particular Kuna patterns and functions.

2. A formally marked line and verse structure, which has been studied in the languages and literatures of several North American Indian groups,[8] and probably has a much wider distribution, with variations, in both North and South America. Kuna lines are marked by both intonational patterns, including, in some ritual-ceremonial genres, a musical melodic structure, and a formalized turn-taking system. There are also sets of words, particles, and affixes, used in every genre and style of speech, which serve both to mark formally a line structure and to distinguish, as sociolinguistic markers, the genres and styles themselves.

3. An elaborate focus on reflexive and metacommunicative language

and speech, a pattern which has been reported, but not yet carefully studied as a North and perhaps South American Indian areal pattern.[9]

4. A structuring of many types of discourse in the form of a two person ritualized, ceremonial dialogue, a pattern that has been noted for many groups in tropical forest South America.[10]

It is important to stress that there is not one single feature which characterizes Kuna discourse as a whole, but that there is rather a set or complex of such characteristic features. Furthermore, it seems to me not to be possible to use these features to identify Kuna language and speech diagnostically as oral rather than as written. While some of these features may turn out to be more characteristic of oral than of written language and speech, others are clearly found in written discourse. And much more cross-cultural research is needed before it can be determined if there is a set of features which uniquely characterize oral language, speech, and literature.[11]

The poetic rhetoric of Kuna discourse can also be approached in terms of its functions. The flexibility of gathering house speech and especially the creative and adaptive use of narration and metaphor is highly suitable for the give and take of everyday politics. The memorized texts used in curing and magic control the spirit world. Extensive and intensive parallelism serves to demonstrate to the spirits concerned that the specialist-performer has intimate knowledge of every aspect of their existence. In particular, parallelistic frameworks are used to demonstrate to the spirits the performer's knowledge of significant and relevant lists and taxonomies -- of plants and animals, of body parts, of disease symptoms, of names, and of activities. A narration of the desired action or event within the text is performative in the Austin sense, in that it not only describes the action or event, but, through its correct (i.e. memorized) narration, actually causes it to occur.[12]

A final and significant characteristic of Kuna discourse worth noting here because of its relation to the topic of this paper is the existence of a range of contexts for the performance of many verbal genres, which can be classified as primary contexts, in which a genre is performed for its officially recognized purpose, and secondary contexts, in which a genre is performed for other purposes -- teaching, learning, practice,

pleasure, play, or reporting.

2. A TYPOLOGY OF RETELLINGS

I turn now to the primary focus of this paper -- Kuna retellings, multiple tellings, and tellings within tellings. A typology of Kuna tellings and retellings reveals the dimensions of their structure and function, textually, contextually, strategically, and ethnographically. The typology deals with the interplay and intersection of what the Kuna call soke (say) or owisoe (tell, report) on the one hand and parsoke (retell, reformulate) on the other.

2.1. The first type of telling-retelling structural organization is a telling followed immediately and sequentially by a retelling. This structure is formalized and ritualized in the speech event held in the evenings in the Kuna gathering or meeting house, in which saklas (chiefs) perform chants for an audience of men and women. A sakla's chant is in a linguistic variety and style different from everyday Kuna and characterized by allusive language. This is followed by a spoken retelling by an arkar (sakla's spokesman-interpreter). The arkar's performance, in a style much closer to everyday Kuna and more understandable to the audience than the sakla's chant, repeats the sakla's narrative and stresses and explains its moralistic intent. Here is a representative example from an arkar's interpretation.

> "On this earth you should treat birds well."
> The nele (seer) advised'
> He [the sakla who has just chanted] told us.[13]

It is important to point out that the use of esoteric and allusive language by the sakla is the official reason for the arkar's retelling. But whether or not the audience understands the sakla's chant, the arkar's reformulation is a necessary, formal segment of the total event. This same pattern occurs semi-formally every time a sakla speaks in the gathering house. His speech is typically followed by a retelling, reformulation, and interpretation by one or more arkars. The more significant the

content, the greater the prestige of the sakla, the more ceremonial the occasion, the more likely that there will be more than one reformulation, not only by arkars, the official interpreters of saklas, but by other speakers.

A parallel, almost isomorphic pattern is found in the magical communication addressed by curing and magical specialists to spirits. The specialists, called ikar wisit (text knowers) in Kuna, address the spirits in a memorized text. In these texts, in which the specialist attempts to convince the spirits to do his bidding, there are repeated reformulations by the specialist. In addition, within the texts themselves, the spirit addressees retell other spirits what the specialist has told them. Since, according to Kuna belief, descriptions narrated in magical texts occur simultaneously in the spirit world, these spirit retellings are considered to be as real and as actual as human ones. The social organization of speaking among spirits parallels that of humans; first there is a two-participant dialogic conversation, then the spirit addressees reformulate, that is, retell and interpret for others, the message of the initial speaker. A mirror image of this pattern, that is human tells spirit, spirit retells spirit, occurs when spirits communicate with humans, either in dreams or in waking life. Just as spirits reformulate what humans tell them, humans reformulate the messages they receive from spirits. Spirits communicate with members of the Kuna community about matters of concern to particular individuals in a village or to the community at large. After the spirit-human communication, the Kuna individual reports back the message of the spirits, not only in conversations with friends and family, but in a public reformulation in a gathering house speech.[14]

2.2. The second type of retelling reports and repeats a first telling which was not heard by the addressees or the audience of the current telling, but occurred on a previous occasion in a different setting. The retelling way of reporting is characteristic of a range of Kuna contexts, from the most everyday to the most ritual and ceremonial. Discourse of all kinds is heavily embedded with speech that has previously occurred, typically in the form of first person direct quotation. In fact Kuna grammar does not readily make a clear distinction between direct and

indirect quotation. The great majority of all quotation is direct, so that speakers are constantly uttering words that are not their own.

an macikwa anka soke ai noni.
my son told me 'your friend came.' [that is my son told me that my friend came].

And direct quotations are often embedded within direct quotations. The following typical example is from a speech given in a gathering house by a medicinal specialist on his return from a period of study with a renowned teacher in a distant village.

'Thus friend I know that ikar (text).' He [the teacher] said.
'Thus some people say "it belongs to the Chocos [a neighboring indian group]";
but it does not belong to the Chocos;' he said.
'Now then a long time ago when the neles [Kuna leaders and prophets] started to come down [to earth];
when the great neles came down.
Then Ipelele [one of the foremost early neles] corporally entered a stronghold, a place called kalu mattu.' He said.
'Now there in the mountain he showed the letter [giving him permission to enter].' He said.
'"Then they took the letter away from me" he [Ipelele] said.
"Then the letter was read" he said;
"it said 'come to my place to learn medicine;
come on Sunday.'
But the people who found the letter did not want to go.
A Choco entered that place;" he said,
"The Choco remained fifteen days," he said,
"below the earth.
Then the Choco was asked [about his experience, when he returned];" he said,
"'Now I [the Choco] entered that place;
now then when I entered it was dark' he said;
'as if my eyes were covered.
Then when I entered further it was alright,' he said.

'The people there,' he said;
'live like people here,' he said.
'The snake is suarinet [native policeman],' he said.
'And the spider is arkar [chief's spokesman],' he said.
'The spider got me a boy,' he said.
'He took me to the sakla [chief],' he said.
'Then when they had taken me to the sakla, the sakla said to me,' he said;
'"What have you come here to do?"
I said "I have brought this letter."
By order of the letter they taught me,' he said;
'"it is well," they said.
"God gave me this place," he [the sakla] said.
"'Before men live here [God is speaking] , so that no evil spirits enter, you will use this medicine.'
God said to me;" he [the sakla] said;' he the Choco said."[15]

The extreme point of quotation within quotation is reached toward the end of this passage when the speaker is quoting his teacher, who is quoting Ipelele, who is quoting a Choco Indian, who is quoting a sakla (chief) of the spirit world, who is quoting God. It is important to point out two significant features of this example, the first having to do with the structure of the telling of narrative and the second having to do with the grammatical marking of embedded tellings. With regard to the telling of narrative, there is a single story line. There is not a story within a story, as is found in some narrative traditions or structures. What is embedded are not stories but tellers.[16] This is what I have tried to represent by making use of the clearly insufficient, western writing tradition device of single and double quotation marks. This leads to the question of the grammatical marking of embedded tellings in Kuna. While Kuna grammar provides a rich potential in metacommunicative words, phrases, particles, and affixes,[17] there is not a necessary and unique formal, overt marking for every embedding. And the metacommunicative elements are often unmarked for person and tense.[18] Nor do intonational (e.g., pitch and tempo) or other stylistic changes mark more than a single level

of embedding and often they do not go even this shallow distance. Thus, in spite of a general rule that the last character introduced into a narrative is most likely to be the next speaker quoted, it becomes very difficult to decode at each moment of the narration (for analysts as well as for native members of the community) exactly who is speaking. My bracketed indentifications in the passage cited above are thus attempts at disambiguation of an often inherently ambiguous reference. The greater the depth of embedding of quotation within quotation, the greater the potential for ambiguity. Competent listening and understanding involves following the story line, recognizing the process of the embedding of direct quotation, and following it to a certain degree. The complex pattern of embedding of direct quotation within direct quotation is clearly an important aspect of the verbal artistry of Kuna discourse.

While quoted, embedded speech is frequently found in colloquial Kuna, the more formal and ceremonial the discourse, the greater the potential for embedding within embedding, the placing of words in the mouths of others being one of the major Kuna rhetorical strategies. It is possible to adopt a certain point of view or argue for a particular position, as though they do not belong to oneself but are simple reports of what someone else has said. An individual's own behavior can be extolled and compared with that of others which is criticized, all as part of a retelling. In the following, a sakla is reporting on a chant of a sakla from another village that he heard while attending a traditional congress, a ceremonial meeting of many leaders, in another village. The quoted sakla is in turn reporting the words of a deceased sakla who came to him in a dream.

"I am speaking about planting the land.
When I was planting I would plant up to the limit of my neighbors" I say.
"I would enter into the land of my neighbors" I say.
"I used to be very active in planting coconuts" I say.
"I would take my neighbors' coconuts" I say.
"People who take their neighbors' coconuts are bad" I say.[19]

Since the Kuna publicly and continually view themselves as a harmonious, egalitarian society, the process of deeply embedding criticism of others in the form of quotations within quotations, including dreams and deceased persons, functions to avoid direct, face-to-face conflict and confrontation between individuals. This rhetorical strategy is a most appropriate and useful form of social control in Kuna society.

One's own actions can be explained and justified by presenting them as retellings of what someone else has said. Here is a medicinal specialist informing his village in a public speech how much he will charge them for his services, for example, providing plants which will keep snakes off their farms. By punctuating every line in which he announces his prices with soke (he says or he said), the specialist insists on the fact that the prices were determined by his teacher, rather than by himself.

'When the farm belongs to a single individual,' he said;
'if a single individual wants to plant,' he said.
'You charge him one dollar' he said.
'Such a farm does not belong to the town,' he said;
'it belongs rather to a single person' he said to me.
'As for persons from other islands,' he said;
'those are charged two dollars.' He said.[20]

Retellings blend into interpretations. For in resaying what someone else has said or even what you yourself have said on another occasion, there is always an implied interpretation. This is so even in seemingly word for word, exact repetitions. For their meaning always depends on the context in which they are uttered and the way in which they are delivered. Furthermore, retellings are often purposeful interpretations. By putting in new words what has been said before, the words are given a new slant, a new meaning, appropriate to the new context.

Retelling, reformulation, and interpretation, which are structurally formalized in ritual and ceremonial speech, are common in everyday speech as well. In ordinary conversations, in the afternoon, as a group of individuals sit around and chat, one person will talk for a while, reporting on his or her activities that day, or some news or gossip he or she

has picked up. These reports are frequently explicit retellings of the words of others. Retelling, reformulation, and interpretation can be used strategically in everyday interaction as well, as a way of indirectly criticizing, reprimanding, complaining, or commanding, using the words of another to state one's own feelings and positions.

Rupen pese kolo urpa. (Ruben, they are calling you down below.)

2.3. A third type of retelling involves the telling of the same narrative content in one way for one purpose in one context and in a different way for another purpose in another context. An excellent example is provided by kwentos (stories) which are performed in spoken form in colloquial Kuna for the amusement and diversion of a gathered audience of typically men and in chanted form by saklas (in the linguistic variety and style of sakla's chanting) for moralistic purposes to men and women in the village gathering house. The linguistic differences between these two tellings are exemplified here in corresponding lines of us kwento (the story of the agouti) recorded with a six year interval from the same sakla, once spoken, once chanted.

us kwento spoken:
takkaru usu mas kunsi (the agouti is sitting eating)

us kwento chanted:
sunna takle masikwa ittosi takle soke ittole (he is sitting tasting).[21]

The two tellings are identical in referential detail and differ in phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical (including metaphorical) features of style. For example, takkaru is a common line initial marker in spoken kwentos; sunna takle, in chanted kwentos. Takle soke ittole is a line final marker in the chanting of saklas. Masikwa (food), part of the longer expression masikwa kunne (to eat) is a longer, more formal and ceremonial form than mas, which is the common, everyday, colloquial form. Ittoe (taste) is somewhat more poetic than kunne (eat). Notice that the function (recreational and amusement/moralistic) of the text is

entirely determined by the context in which it is performed, not by its referential content.

In the case of kwentos, the same narrative content is transformed into two different genres, a spoken, humorous genre and a chanted, moralistic genre. Similar transformations occur in the telling and retelling of news and new information within a village. When someone has such news, a special personal experience, like a trip or event witnessed (a boat overturning or a plane falling), this is told and retold, to friends, family, and more formally and publically in the gathering house. Little by little, everyone in the community comes to know the news and as retellings are transformed into different genres, from private to public, culminating in gathering house oratory, what becomes increasingly important is not the news itself, but the way of telling it.

2.4. A related but distinct type of telling-retelling interplay is the range of contexts for the performance of magical texts, which I mentioned briefly above. Magical texts, used in curing, disease prevention, control of various objects including plants and animals, and girls' puberty rites, are performed in a range of contexts in addition to those associated with their primary and official purposes. These less ritual-ceremonial, more everyday contexts involve teaching, learning, practicing, pleasure (personal and familial), play, public display, and reporting.

Curing, magical, and puberty rites texts are taught in the evening, after sundown and on into the night, typically on evenings on which saklas do not chant in the gathering house and the men's gathering involves no serious or particularly interesting topic. The learning sessions take place in the house of the teacher where his family listens in as he performs and as the student performs and is corrected by the teacher. Specialists also often practice, whether or not they have students, on evenings when there is no gathering house chanting. Such performance for practice blends into performance for pleasure, for both performer and those family members who serve as audience, lying in adjacent hammocks and falling asleep as they listen to the words they partially understand. Neighbors and passers-by can also hear the texts, which last for hours and, in the case of some specialists, are boomed out. The spirit world

also listens in to these performances and derives pleasure from them as well. Spirits like humans enjoy listening to magical texts out of their official contexts, in which some of them are rarely performed.

Curing and magical texts are also performed, for the pleasure of humans and spirits, in the inna house (ritual tavern), as one of the many unofficial activities that occur during the festivities associated with girls' puberty rites. The primary, official, and central verbal event during girls' puberty rites is the performance by the kantule, the director of these rites, who, together with his student-assistants, shouts out a long text, lasting up to three days. But at the same time as the kantule's performance, or during breaks within it, or during puberty rites at which kantules do not perform, specialists in magical texts perform them for a gathered group of individuals, who typically purchase a bottle of rum which is consumed during the performance. Certain texts, which are especially poetic and dramatic, are very popular in this regard, for example, the way of the devil. Even if the small audience understands the details to varying degrees, there is general appreciation and respect for the performer, who, in a state of great inebriation, rattles off his text. No curative function is involved here, any more than in any of the other secondary or unofficial contexts in which these texts are performed. However, in addition to humans, the spirit world is also participating in the puberty festivities and enjoys listening to the performance of these texts, which are in their special language. Kuna puberty rites and especially the associated festivities and activities are rites of reversal, in a variety of ways. The performance of curing and magical texts are one interesting example. When performed in their primary context, and for their primary function, curing, the spirits are the official addressees and humans, unofficial bystanders. When performed during puberty festivities, for play, pleasure, and amusement, these roles are reversed; the humans are the official addressees; the spirits, the unofficial bystanders. In addition, while both humans and spirits are enjoying the verbally artistic properties of these texts, they are both also simultaneously, directly, and publicly informed of the knowledge and ability of the performer.

The range of contexts for the performance of ritual-ceremonial, especially curing and magical texts can be accounted for in terms of the transmission of traditional knowledge, display of personal ability and

knowledge, and appreciation of verbal art and play, on the part of both the human and the spirit world. There is no desacralization involved in performing curing and magical texts out of their primary ritual contexts. Anything but. It is the constant performance of these texts, for both spirits and humans, in a variety of settings, in a variety of ways, for a variety of purposes, that gives the impression (to the insider or outsider) of the vitality and dynamism of Kuna ritual and ceremonial life. The ritual-ceremonial is never completely put aside, out of the way, reserved only for unusual, special, rarely occurring moments.

2.5. I turn not to the fifth and final type of retelling, which involves the performance of the same narrative content as the central verbal event of two separate and discrete ritual-ceremonial traditions, by different performers, in different linguistic varieties, in different contexts. Thus during the puberty rites of Kuna girls, the kantule, the director of these ritual ceremonies, performs long texts addressed to a particular spirit, that of a long native flute. About one week before these puberty rites, another ritual specialist, the inna sopet (the maker of inna, a fermented sugar cane drink) performs a text to the spirit of the drink itself, during the fermentation process. The drink is consumed in large quanitites during the puberty festivities. These two performers belong to separate ritual-ceremonial traditions; the texts are in different linguistic varieties, performed in different settings, for different purposes (the inna sopet's text to insure the proper fermentation of the drink, the kantule's text to insure the proper and successful carrying out of the puberty ritual). Yet the two texts share striking details of narrative content. Both describe the various preparations for the puberty ritual and festivities as well as such aspects of the ritual and festivities themselves as the preparatory bathing in the river and the drinking of inna by the community.

From the inna sopet's text (the way of the inna making):
They go to the river to bathe.
They stand up in the river.
The water makes waves.
The water really makes waves.

The water is splashing.
The water is gushing.
The river sardines leave their smell in the hair.
The hair stands and spreads out on the water.

From the kantule's puberty rites text:
She arrives at the river.
She stands up in the river.
She bathes in the river.

.....

The water makes waves.
The water is splashing up and down on her body.
The hair rises and floats on the water.

.....

The hair smells like fish.

From the inna sopet's 'way of the inna making':
The necklaces of the women are making much noise.
They cannot be distinguished one from the other.

From the kantule's puberty rites text:
The women's kala tere necklaces are making much noise.
The women's kala tere necklaces can be heard afar.[22]

The similarities in narrative content between these two texts are especially remarkable in that a strict separation of the two ritual-ceremonial traditions involved is maintained. The two performers are not students of each other; in most cases they are probably unaware of the degree of referential similarity in their respective texts. This intriguing type of multiple telling does not consist of a sequential reinterpretation by a second person of a first person's chant or speech as in type one, or an embedding of previous tellings into a current telling as in type two, or a transformation of a single narrative content into different genres by the same performer as in type three, or the existence of a range of quite different contexts for the performance of

the same genre as in type four. Rather, in type five, the same content is found in two separate and independent genres. The similarities can be explained according to the Kuna theory and practice of magic and the nature of narration. Kuna magic operates by means of magical texts addressed to spirits. The texts describe events which the performer wants to occur. Narration must be minute and detailed, as explicit a reflex as possible of the desired events. In the case of both the kantule's puberty rites text and the inna sopet's inna fermentation text, the events the performer wants to occur are identical -- the successful completion of the puberty rites and festivities. This is precisely what is described in the two texts. The result is partial overlaps and isomorphisms in the referential contents of these texts, which belong to otherwise distinct ritual-ceremonial traditions, overlaps and isomorphisms whose precise outlines outside analysts may be able to perceive better than the members of the community.

3. CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper is a set of related processes and patterns in the structuring and organization of the discourse of a South American Indian nonliterate society. Detailed, empirical explorations of such processes and patterns are necessary steps in the understanding of their significance, for particular societies, such as the Kuna, for the study of the discourse of other American Indian societies, and for the more general and comparative study of nonliterate discourse. An examination of tellings, retellings, multiple tellings, and tellings within tellings, their structure and function, deepens our understanding of the nature of Kuna discourse and ethnography of speaking. Tellings and retellings are central to Kuna verbal life. Attention to different types of telling-retelling relationships has enabled me to focus on such matters as the interplay of allusive and non-allusive language, rhetorical strategies in speech, the verbal expression of news or new information, and the Kuna theory and practice of magic and of narration. While the details are no doubt particular to the Kuna, this discussion has relevance for the study of the discourse of other American Indian societies, especially those of the South American tropical forest, where certain discourse patterns are

known to have interesting areal distributions,[23] and perhaps for the study of preliterate societies more generally, especially the question of the qualitative differences between literate and oral or preliterate societies with regard to communication.

Central to my analysis is a focus on the dynamic relationship between the textual and the contextual. In this regard, three concepts or approaches to the study of discourse which have been implicit in my discussion seem worth making explicit. The first is an insistence on the analysis of actual verbal performance in actual social and cultural contexts, rather than an analysis of an abstracted form or version of such performances. It was only by paying serious and careful attention to actual performances that I was able to uncover the significance of retellings, multiple tellings, and tellings within tellings in Kuna verbal life. The second concept is that of metacommunication. Metacommunication is recognized as one of the functions of language by scholars who insist on a multifunctional approach to language.[24] It has also been noted as an important aspect of communication systems more generally.[25] All Kuna retellings are implicitly metacommunicative in that they are implicit commentaries on the telling that they repeat or interpret. In addition Kuna discourse of all kinds contains a considerable degree of commentary which states explicitly when and where the event of which it is a part is taking place, who is speaking and to whom, what actions are occurring, what topic and content are being spoken about, and why all this is being done. This commentary is reflexive -- it points inward toward the participants of the event and to the event itself; and it is metacommunicative, in that it comments on the communication process itself. While metacommunicative and reflexive language is characteristic of all Kuna discourse, it is especially elaborated in formal and ritual-ceremonial speech, often as part of the process of retelling. The third and related concept is that of frame, a concept that has been used in a variety of ways by scholars in a variety of fields and the structure of which is carefully explored in a recent book by Erving Goffman.[26] One way to conceive of the different Kuna tellings is as different frames for the presentation of the same narrative content, different transformations of the same reality. These frames are part of the structure as well as the strategy of Kuna verbal life.

It also seems appropriate to contrast the approach utilized here with Lévi-Strauss' analysis of myth, especially since Lévi-Strauss is concerned in large part with South American Indians, thus including the Kuna.[27] In Lévi-Strauss' approach, different versions of the 'same' narrative are sought, in different societies, in different contexts, for the purpose of attaining greater and greater abstraction of analysis. In my approach, different versions, really tellings and retellings, are investigated in order to attain greater ethnographic precision and depth in the study of the verbal life of a single group of people, the Kuna Indians.[28]

FOOTNOTES

1. See Howe, Sherzer, and Chapin (1980), Kramer (1970), Sherzer and Sherzer (1972), Sherzer (1974), and Sherzer (1977).

2. See Sherzer (1974).

3. The degree to which Kuna puberty rites texts are fixed in form is reflected in a personal experience in the field. In 1970 I made a tape recording of a puberty rites specialist teaching a text to several students. Between 1970 and 1979 I never discussed this text with him. In March of 1979, nine years after the original recording, I brought him a transcription I had made of the text, in order to translate it into ordinary colloquial Kuna, from which it differs considerably. Since he does not read or write, he asked me to read him the text. I did so line by line and he translated each line into colloquial Kuna. Typically, I barely began a line and he finished it, never missing a morpheme or even a phoneme from my transcription. In a few cases where I misread a tiny detail of my own writing, he corrected me.

4. See Reichard (1944).

5. Notice that metrical factors are crucial to the Parry-Lord definition of the formula. (See Lord, 1966.) This is not so for Kuna formulaic expressions, which are also akin to what literary scholars call topoi. (See Curtius, 1953.) See Stolz and Shannon (1976) for discussions of the applicability of the concept of the formula to various oral literatures around the world.

6. See Finnegan (1977:52-87).

7. See Goody (1977) and Lord (1960).

8. See Bright (1979), Hymes (1977), and Tedlock (1978).

9. Silverstein (1980) is a detailed analysis of the role of metacommunicative language in Chinookan narrative.

10. See Fock (1963), Rivière (1971).

11. I intend these remarks to be in the spirit of Finnegan's important book (1977).

12. See Austin (1965). Kuna magical texts involve both implicit and explicit performatives. See Foster (1974) for an analysis of the role of performatives in the discourse of another American Indian society.

13. Portion of an interpretation of the chant of a visiting sakla, performed by arkar Armando of Mulatuppu on April 9, 1970.

14. An interesting variant of this pattern, quite in keeping with Kuna adaptation to changing times, involves the use of cassette recorders. A nele (seer) from the Kuna village of Ailikanti who lives in Panama City sometimes has dreams in which spirits communicate to him concerning matters of relevance to his San Blas village. He then tapes a speech in which he reformulates and reinterprets the spirit messages and sends the cassette by small plane to Ailikanti, where it is played before an audience in the gathering house.

15. Portion of a speech by Olowitinappi of the village of Mulatuppu in the Mulatuppu gathering house on June 16, 1970. The complete Kuna version of this speech is included in Howe, Sherzer, and Chapin (1980).

16. A comparison with The Arabian Nights' Entertainments (One Thousand and One Stories) and Plato's Symposium is interesting. In both of these literary classics, the embedding of both stories within stories and tellers within tellers is a distincitve characteristic. It is an interesting question whether this process is more a feature of oral than written literature. John Barth's modern short story 'Manelaiad' (1968) uses tellers within tellers and tellings within tellings to refashion a classic story.

17. A comparison with Homeric speech formulas might prove interesting. See Edwards (1970).

18. Ladislav Matejka has observed (personal communication) that quotatives are frequently unmarked for person and time, especially when they are incorporated in a language as formal, grammatical devices.

19. Portion of chant performed by sakla Dionysio of the village of Mulatuppu on March 12, 1979.

20. Portion of a speech by Olowitinappi of the village of Mulatuppu on June 16, 1970. The complete Kuna version of this speech is included in Howe, Sherzer, and Chapin (1980).

21. Sakla Muristo Perez of Mulatuppu performed the spoken version of us kwento in 1970 and the chanted version in 1976.

22. The way of the inna making was performed by Mastaletat of the village of Mulatuppu. The puberty rites text was performed by Kantule

Ernesto Linares, also of Mulatuppu.

23. Thus Fock (1963) and Rivière (1971) discuss the areal distribution in South America of ritualized ceremonial dialogue.

24. See Hymes (1974), Jakobson (1960).

25. See Bateson (1972).

26. Goffman (1974).

27. Lévi-Strauss (1964-1971).

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